1:Beals E-5 (1940-1941)1946 NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

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THE SETTING AND THE PEOPLE

133 have large level tracts, for most of the elevated part of the State is in the so-called "volcanic axis" of Mexico. In many regions, and this is particularly true of the area occupied by the Tarascans, the characteristic sky line is a series of old volcanic cones, often surrounding basins or long depressions, in which more recent low cinder cones frequently occur (pl. 1, upper and lower left). Dozens of peaks have elevations of over 10,000 feet, but only one may exceed 11,000 feet.

To the south and southwest the terrain drops sharply toward a great basin formed by tributaries of the Balsas River. The slope is steep and so thoroughly dissected by streams that, despite the opening of many roads and truck trails in recent years, it still is not possible to reach the Balsas River by road from highland [184] Michoacán. This great basin forms an important portion of Michoacán and is much visited by the Tarascans. Tropical vegetation and [137] climate characterize the basin except for a [132] semiarid section in the west.

The Pacific coast of the State is paralleled by a large range of mountains, the Sierra de

665 In relation to external politics, most Cherán
666 inhabitants have little interest. There are many people who are willing to take a free ride to some big rally for one or another presidential candidate, eat heartily of the free meal, and cheer the candidate's speech enthusiastically. The following week they are quite as ready to accept the hospitality of the opposing candidate, and at election time be too disinterested to vote. Not only is interest lacking, but there is considerable cynicism about the external Government agencies. As one humble farmer remarked, *"Almazán o Camacho, ¿que nos importa? Aqui siempre estamos en la riata*—Almazán or Camacho, what does it matter to us? Here we are always in the noose."

484 Some interest is also awakened by the dis-
666 covery of the Indians as a colorful adjunct to ceremonials. At the inauguration of Camacho as president, some Federal agency (probably the *Departamento Autónomo de Asuntos Indígenas*) took the town officials, the band, and a group of moro dancers to Mexico City. The Cherán citizens lucky enough to get such a trip are always pleased, but it is doubtful whether they are much interested in the reasons.

FISCAL SYSTEM

632 Just as the economy of Cherán in general is
651 partly a money economy, the governmental system is also based partly on money. The presence of hired officials immediately requires some form of cash income for the town. This income is derived from the following sources:

1. Taxes on each beef slaughtered.
2. Taxes of $1.15 on each bill of sale for an animal.
3. Fines.
4. Business licenses. These are collected by the State tax collector, who remits 40 percent of collections to the municipal treasury.
5. Registration of brands. Every cattle [422] brand must be registered and the registry renewed in the first 3 months of each year. This is the biggest source of income for the *municipio*. Three pesos are collected by the *municipio*, which also collects and remits 30 centavos to the State government and 15 centavos to the Federal Government for each brand.
6. Market tax (*piso de plaza*). Every vender in the plaza on Saturdays and at the

[p.1276]

527 organized fights or any considerable amount of
541 betting. During 8 months I neither saw nor heard of cock fighting except in connection with the fiesta.

CARNIVAL

527 The Tuesday before the beginning of Lent, everyone fasts until noon. After breaking the
[785] fast, the young men go about the streets, some with musicians and some without. The girls sit at the doors of their houses with baskets of elaborately painted eggshells filled with confetti which they have been saving for several months. The boys buy the eggs from the girls and then break them over the girls' heads. The boys and girls also throw confetti at one another and sometimes the boys get such things as oranges and throw them at one another. This is repeated on Wednesday and is the only celebration of carnival.

LENT AND HOLY WEEK

796 Most of the population fast part of Lent. Some people fast until noon every day. Others
[785] do this only two or three times. On Fridays most people abstain from meat but otherwise do not fast especially.

Before Palm Sunday, the collector (an official
[624] of the *cabildo*) visits the fathers of boys of suitable age and selects a boy from each *barrio*. When the boy and his father have accepted, the boy picks a girl to assist him, usually his sweetheart. The collector then visits the girl's father and gets his consent. The boys now
● [484] make a trip to the hot country to bring back green palm leaves for use in the church on Palm Sunday. Before leaving, each boy gives the girl about half a hectoliter of maize, 5 liters of black maize, and some brown sugar. The
[252] girl toasts the regular maize well, grinds it, and makes large balls of the ground maize, or pinole, and the brown sugar. These are wrapped in leaves painted with many colors with analine dyes. The black maize she makes into *gorditos*, a sort of fried tortilla.

The boy also provides a wooden cross some 5 feet high. To this are fastened the balls of pinole along the upright and the arms of the cross. At the top of the cross and on the arms are also hung many fiber bags (*morales*) and small cloths used to wrap up tortillas. The